VZCZCXRO2820
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHLB #0418/01 0981703
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 081703Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4652
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3649
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3849
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000418

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO/A A/S WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR MCDERMOTT SHAPIRO
DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON
DRL/NESA FOR WHITMAN BARGHOUT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2019
TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR AID LE
SUBJECT: LEBANON: CANDIDATES REGISTERED... WHAT NEXT?

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

OFFICIAL CANDIDATE
REGISTRATION COMPLETE

¶1. (SBU) Registration of candidates for the June 7 parliamentary elections officially closed at 11:59 pm April ¶7. The official count of registered candidates reached 702, for the 128 seats in cabinet. Only eight of these are women; Nayla Tueni in Beirut and Education Minister Bahiya Hariri in Sidon being the most notable. Registered candidates have until April 21 to withdraw their candidacy, with replacement possible by another registered candidate.

¶2. (SBU) The battleground Zahle district (predominantly Christian, West Bekaa) saw the most registrations with 69 candidates for seven seats. Tiny Minnieh-Dinnieh had 12 registrations for each of its three seats, making it the most intensely contested district. Several individual political parties have unveiled their political platforms. Two March 14 parties, Future Movement and Lebanese Forces, held conventions April 4 and 5 respectively, while Walid Jumblatt's PSP will hold its conference May 1. Amal Leader and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri announced Amal would unveil its candidates soon. Hizballah announced its candidates on April 1 (septel).

NOTABLES AND NOTEWORTHY

¶3. (SBU) Noteworthy among the registered candidates:

-- Saida: PM Fouad Siniora announced his candidacy for one of Saida's two seats. He will run with current March 14 Education Minister Bahiya Hariri (Rafiq's sister, Saad's aunt.) Instead of maintaining an agreement between the majority and opposition to split the two seats, March 14 decided to contest both seats, a move that raised some eyebrows because of the possibility of Sunni-Shia conflict during a contested race. Hariri and Siniora would be favored in this strongly Sunni district.

-- Baabda, Jezzine: Christian opposition leader Michel Aoun and his nominal ally Speaker Nabih Berri continue to dispute who gets to name Christian candidates in predominantly Shia districts such as Jezzine and Baabda, which also have

significant Christian populations. The list of candidates indicates that their ally, Hizballah, is seeking to mediate between them by giving up its seats in certain districts in favor of Aoun's-- much to Berri's displeasure.

-- Kesrwan: Michel Aoun will run for re-election here. Carlos Edde, a Christian March 14 gadfly, registered to run in this district, a mild surprise. This may be a tactical move by March 14 because Edde is an outspoken critic of Aoun who can challenge him in political discourse, although not in popularity. Prominent businessman Neemat Frem decided not to run, leaving one of the district's "big families" out of the election.

-- Tripoli: Expected candidates registered including former PM and Syrian supporter Omar Karami, independent and former PM Najib Mikati, Minister Mohammed Safadi and Mosbah al-Ahdab. Saad Hariri's Future Movement candidates will include Samir Saadeh, an outsider from Batroun, but not prominent March 14 Secretariat figure Samir Franjieh. The Tripoli electoral scene remains fluid, with meetings ongoing among all of the major players and Saad Hariri (septel).

-- Aley: March 14 Druze leader Walid Jumblatt made a concession by giving up two candidate seats to his allies. There is strong perception by some interlocutors that Jumblatt's very reluctantly agreed to take two Christian candidates in districts where he is strong as a concession to his March 14 allies. His weak endorsements of the two candidates is viewed as Jumblatt indicating to his supporters that they should vote "freely," even if it means not for the

two he publicly endorsed.

-- Others: Former Speaker Hussein Husseini registered in Baalbeck-Hermel, but has given no indication of any candidate list affiliation. Meanwhile, Ahmed al-Assaad, registered in Marjeyoun as an independent.

ELECTION COMMAND CENTER

¶4. (C) Interior Minister Ziad Baroud hosted President Sleiman, PM Siniora, Speaker Berri and invited donor representatives, including USAID Mission Director, to open the Election Command Center at midnight on April 7. President Sleiman spoke of the election producing winners and losers, but noted that everyone "moves forward." At the event in which Sleiman ceremoniously closed the doors to the center at midnight to signal the end of the registration period, a USAID-funded election website was unveiled. The website, www.elections.gov.lb , was developed by IFES and will provide official electoral updates. Additionally, the center includes a dedicated election and voter fraud and abuse hotline for callers to make anonymous reports on irregularities.
SISON